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SUBJECT: POLITICS IN LUOLAND

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[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The perception that the central government is actively opposed to the interests of Nyanza Province's Luo community and its leaders motivates many Luos to stand firmly behind "their man" Raila Odinga. Support for Odinga's ODM-K is widespread in Nyanza, but a pile-up in identification card issuance by the central government threatens to disenfranchise thousands of would be ODM-K voters in the next election, raising the risk of conflict. END SUMMARY.

Self-Image: A Community of Victims

[1](#)2. (U) The Luos, comprising an estimated 14 percent of Kenya's population primarily centered in Nyanza province, are a strongly unified community held together by a common language, customs, and history, including a self-image as a community victimized by an unjust state. They form a unified voting block which is staunchly supportive of Luoland's local hero Raila Odinga. During several conversations with poloff, Nyanza Luos expressed their strong support for ODM-K and Odinga in particular. There is a strong perception among the populace that the central government, where Luos are under-represented, has systematically neglected the area for political reasons, denying it much-needed development assistance and improvements to infrastructure.

Local Near-Royals Offer Hope

[1](#)3. (SBU) It is difficult to substantiate claims that Nyanza province, a traditional stronghold of the opposition, has been deliberately neglected by the central government and those in power. Nevertheless, the perception of this ill-treatment is very real, as illustrated in numerous conversations with Nyanza Luos, causing most people to pin their hopes on a local leader. Odinga, the savvy political heir of the almost royal Odinga family, offers himself as Nyanza's chosen one. He frequently plays to the crowd reinforcing the perception that Luos can only rely on each other for assistance and not, as has been amply demonstrated, the central government dominated by other tribes. (Note: The November 2005 constitutional referendum had a polarizing effect on the country, pitting GEMA (Kikuyu and ethnic cousins) and non-GEMA against each other. In the case of the Luos, this divide is part of a larger one, that between two

socio-linguistic groups, the Bantu (GEMA and others) and the Nilotic (the Luo and their distant cousins). Kenyans voted largely along these lines. Luos voted overwhelming against the proposed constitution, which was viewed as advancing Bantu/GEMA/Kikuyu interests at the expense of other groups. They also saw the document as a double-cross of their hero, Odinga (merely the latest double-cross of a prominent Luo), who was meant according to the pre-2002 deal with Kibaki to get the "strong Prime Minister" position in the planned new constitution, a position Kibaki's inner circle edited out of the draft before the voters saw it. End Note.)

14. (U) Given this history, the vast majority of Luos place their faith in Odinga to lead them to\

JQ-;QQTt2Q Qyanza will follow his lead.

Don't Bother Challenging Odinga Here

15. (SBU) While there is some discomfort with or resentment over the dominance of the Odinga family (especially Raila and his late father Oginga Odinga) over Luo politics, attempts to present an alternative choice to voters have not been very successful. Fellow Luo and Foreign Minister Raphael Tuju attempted to provide Luos with an alternative to Odinga style politics when he announced the creation of the People's Progressive Party in autumn 2005. Despite some concern within the Luo community over what some say is the heavy-handedness of Odinga's political machine, the People's Progressive Party attracted few adherents, and even fewer voters supporting its platform in favor of the proposed constitution. (Note: a District Officer for Kisumu Rural, who was previously assigned in Bondo and Suba Districts, described all three Nyanza Province districts to poloff as "fiercely loyal" to Odinga.)

16. (SBU) "Outside" challengers fare even more poorly. In Kisumu, the capital of Luoland, poloff one day observed an enormous newly-erected billboard of Coast Province presidential hopeful Najib Balala at one of the major traffic intersections. On a return visit two days later, the billboard was gone. The billboard was removed so quickly that when poloff queried a local contact who frequently travels that intersection about the sign, she said she had never seen it.

Voter Registration: SNAFU or Plot?

17. (SBU) The perception that the central government seeks to marginalize Nyanza's population could magnify the effects of the abysmal turnout in the recently concluded voter registration campaign. In Kisumu, as elsewhere in Nyanza, the number of newly registered voters fell far short of expectations. The Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) estimated that 95,000 people were expected to register during the drive, a number based on population growth figures and previous voter registration drives. Three weeks into the four-week campaign, just three percent of that number had registered.

18. (SBU) The meager number of new voters is not the result of a lack of civic interest, the Kisumu District Election Coordinator (KDEC) assured poloff, but rather results from a significant delay in the issuance of national identification cards from the central government, which are necessary to register to vote. According to the KDEC, the central government agency responsible for issuing identification cards was overwhelmed by the sheer number of nation-wide requests for identification cards. The KDEC reported that while the process should take 90 days, many people have been waiting for over a year to receive their IDs. Significant numbers of youth and other potential new voters risk being disenfranchised in the upcoming elections due to ID issuance problems.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) Delays in ID card issuance are reported throughout Kenya, but the local perception of central government neglect and the suspicion, voiced on a number of occasions to poloff, that the central government is deliberately delaying ID applications from opposition strongholds, could mean trouble.

The populace is quick to assume nefarious machinations are driving the delay in national ID cards. Should an influential figure such as Odinga accuse the government of such a scheme, even without proof, violent conflict might result.

RANNEBERGER